



***Melanoma Institute Australia* leads the world-first study that finds anti-PD-1 antibody pembrolizumab increases the survival of patients with advanced melanoma.**

This is a landmark study, the first in a class of drugs that will change the future of treatment for all cancers.

Embargoed until Monday, 20 April, 2015: *Melanoma Institute Australia* and its key affiliate, Crown Princess Mary Cancer Centre Westmead were the highest recruiting centre worldwide for the study into the immunotherapies pembrolizumab versus ipilimumab, in advanced melanoma, with the findings published today in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the leading medical journal in the world.

The study found that the anti-PD-1 antibody pembrolizumab (trade name KEYTRUDA®) prolonged survival, and had less high-grade toxicity, compared with ipilimumab (trade name YERVOY®) in patients with advanced melanoma, that is, melanoma that has spread to distant parts of the body.

Associate Professor Georgina Long from *Melanoma Institute Australia* and *University of Sydney* said, "Here at MIA and Westmead we have been undertaking clinical trials with immunotherapy treatment using anti-PD-1 drugs for over three years, and these findings are the final piece of data that show the anti-PD-1 antibody pembrolizumab is better than current treatments for patients with advanced melanoma."

The immune checkpoint inhibitor, ipilimumab, is one of the standard treatments for patients with advanced melanoma. The latest findings show that pembrolizumab, which inhibits the programmed death receptor 1 (PD-1) immune checkpoint on immune T cells, has antitumor activity: that is, it reduces the size of the tumours in patients with advanced melanoma in approximately 70% of patients, with deep reduction in over 30%, and prolongs survival compared with ipilimumab.

This clinical trial using pembrolizumab (KEYTRUDA®) recorded a 1 year survival rate of 74%, whilst those who received ipilimumab (YERVOY®) had a 1 year survival rate of 58%. Five years ago, only 30-35% of patients with advanced melanoma survived 1-year.

"These results are world-first, where two effective immunotherapies are directly compared, and we significantly improve outcomes for patients even further. This is great news for Australia, which has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world, and an Australian dies from this disease every 6 hours" said Assoc Prof Georgina Long. "This is evidence which will be

considered by bodies around the world, including the Australian Government, to make these drugs accessible to all melanoma patients".

Research Co-Director of Melanoma Institute Australia and Macquarie University Professor Rick Kefford claims, "this breakthrough is probably the most important development in the treatment of this disease ever, and a landmark in terms of cancer treatment in general."

Others Australian centres involved in this trial include: Newcastle Melanoma Unit, NSW; The Austin Hospital, VIC; Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital, WA; Princes Alexandra Hospital, QLD; Sydney Cancer Centre, RPAH, NSW.

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Backgrounder on melanoma:

- In 2009, the 1-year survival rate for patients with stage 4 melanoma was only 30 per cent.
- With advances in medical research, today we are seeing survival rates of up to 80 per cent.
- Half of patients diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma will develop brain metastases at some point during their illness, and 20–25 per cent will already have brain metastases when first diagnosed with stage 4 melanoma.
- Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world and is often referred to as "Australia's national cancer".
- Around 12,500 new cases are diagnosed each year and it is responsible for over 1,500 deaths.
- One person every six hours will die from melanoma in Australia.
- Melanoma is the most common cancer in young Australians, affecting more individuals aged 15 to 39 than any other cancer.
- While 90 per cent of people with melanoma are able to be cured by having the primary melanoma cancer removed, the cancer spreads in the other 10 per cent because it is caught too late.

Melanoma Institute Australia

- Melanoma Institute Australia (MIA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preventing and curing melanoma through innovative research, treatment and education programs.
- Headquartered at the Poche Centre in North Sydney, it is now the world's largest melanoma research and treatment centre.
- MIA is affiliated with The University of Sydney, St Vincent's and Mater Health Sydney, The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Australian & New Zealand Melanoma Trials Group (ANZMTG).
- Melanoma Institute Australia relies on the generosity of individuals, organisations and government funding to continue its ground-breaking work into this potentially devastating cancer.
- You can follow Melanoma Institute Australia on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Melanoma-Institute-Australia or on Twitter at @MelanomaAus.